What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus for automatically turning off a source of illumination in a microscope, comprising:

a switch operatively arranged to control said illumination source;

means for sensing inactivity of said switch and for turning off said illumination source after a predetermined time period of inactivity.

2. The apparatus recited in Claim 1, wherein said switch is a mechanical switch.

3. The apparatus recited in Claim 2, wherein said switch is a single pole, single throw switch.

4. The apparatus recited in Claim 1, wherein said means for sensing inactivity of said switch and for turning off said illumination source after a predetermined time period of inactivity comprises a microprocessor.

5. The apparatus recited in Claim 1, wherein said means for sensing inactivity of said switch comprises a digital semiconductor device operatively arranged to sense a logic level at one terminal of said switch.

6. The apparatus recited in Claim 1, wherein said illumination source is an incandescent light bulb.

7. An apparatus for automatically turning off a power supply in a microscope, comprising:

at least one switch element operatively arranged to control said power supply; and,

means for sensing inactivity of said at least one switch element and for turning off said power supply after a predetermined time period of inactivity.

8. The apparatus recited in Claim 7 further comprising an illumination source controlled by said means for sensing inactivity of said at least one switch element.

9. A method for automatically turning off a source of illumination in a microscope, comprising the steps of:

monitoring activity of a switch operatively arranged to control said illumination source; and,

turning off said illumination source after a predetermined time period of inactivity.

10. The method recited in Claim 9 wherein said step of monitoring activity of a switch comprises monitoring a logic level at one terminal of said switch, and triggering a shutdown of said illumination source when a transition in said logic level occurs.

11. The method recited in Claim 9 wherein said step of monitoring is done digitally.